

West Wazee Street Warehouse
District
Wazee Street
Denver
Denver County
Colorado

HABS No. CO-70

HABS
COLO,
16-DENV,
16-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WEST WAZEE STREET WAREHOUSE DISTRICT

Location:

1100 - 1300 Blocks
Wazee Street
Denver
Denver County, Colorado 802D4

UTM: A. 13.499580.4399560
B. 13.499820.4399700
C. 13.49980D.4399720
D. 13.499560.439960D

Quad: Fort Logan, Colorado

Dates of Construction:

circa 1885 to circa 1915

Present Owners:

1123 Wazee St. - Elizabeth & Robert L. Knous
775 Olive Street
Denver, Co.

1127 Wazee St. - Desks Incorporated
1127 Wazee Street
Denver, Co.

1143 Wazee St. - Desks Incorporated
1127 Wazee Street
Denver, Co.

1201.1209 Wazee- Channing, Inc.
St. % Jeanne S. Krier
938 San Pablo Drive
Lake San Marcos, Calif.

1213-1221 Wazee- Bruce S. Scott
St. James N. Kayser
Donald B. Berland
1213 Wazee Street
Denver, Co.

1225-1233 Wazee- Channing, Inc.
St. % Jeanne S. Krier
938 San Pablo Drive
Lake San Marcos, Calif.

Present Owners cont.

1235-1245 Wazee- Channing, Inc.
St. % Jeanne S. Krier
938 San Pablo Drive
Lake San Marcos, Calif.

1301 Wazee St. - Carson's Inc.
1301 Wazee Street
Denver, Co.

1333 Wazee St. - Lucy and Sam Frisch
1333 Wazee Street
Denver, Co.

Present Use:

Commercial (Retail, Offices,
Warehouses)

Introduction:

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth, West Wazee Street served as Denver's principal whole-sale and warehouse district. The development of the Wazee Warehouse District was made possible by the area's location which afforded both street frontage along Wazee Street and convenient railroad access immediately to the northwest. In addition, Union Station, the Denver and Rio Grande freight depot and other freight depots were located in the area so that limited freight handling was necessary. Inter-city access was provided by the 14th Street Viaduct whose southern terminus was linked to Wazee Street.

The nine buildings which survive in the 1100 - 1300 blocks of Wazee Street form an intact row of structures representing the history of the area as a warehouse center. These buildings are distinguished by similarities in scale, size, design and materials. The architectural and historical significance of the Wazee buildings was recognized in June, 1983, when the West Wazee Street Warehouse District was determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Documentation of the district was necessitated by the proposed construction of Project FCU 040-4(6), Colfax Viaduct, Final Phase. This project will replace the structurally deficient Larimer leg of the Colfax-Lawrence-Larimer Viaduct with a three-lane westbound viaduct in the Walnut-Wazee Street corridor. Construction of the Walnut Viaduct will make possible the future construction of the Auraria Parkway immediately south of Wazee Street.

The Federal Highway Administration is the lead agency in charge of Project FCU 040-4(6), Colfax Viaduct, Final Phase. The Colorado Department of Highways is the state agency directly responsible for preparing the Environmental Assessment and preliminary project engineering.

Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendoff is the engineering firm responsible for project design and historical documentation on behalf of the Colorado Department of Highways.

In compliance with Section 800.4 of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regulations the potential effects of the proposed undertaking were evaluated. It was determined that the future development of the Auraria Parkway will adversely affect the Wazee Street buildings. Although the Wazee Street buildings will be retained intact, the structures will be oriented towards the proposed Parkway posing a potential adverse visual effect. Recordation to Historic American Buildings Survey standards was prescribed to mitigate the project's potential adverse effect.

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

Pages 1-3 previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 1100-1300 Blocks of West Wazee Street, Denver, Denver County, Colorado

HISTORY OF THE WEST WAZEE STREET WAREHOUSE DISTRICT

The beginnings of West Wazee Street in Denver can be traced back to the founding of Auraria, the first permanent settlement in present-day Denver. This pioneer town grew up at the confluence of the South Platte River and the west bank of Cherry Creek in the fall of 1858, following the discovery of gold in the vicinity. The competing town of St. Charles, better known as Denver City, was established on the opposite side of Cherry Creek the same year. In 1860, the two towns were consolidated under the name "Denver" with former Auraria known as "West Denver."

At first, West Denver possessed the larger population, more substantial construction and a large part of the wholesale and retail trade.¹ But its early prosperity was cut short by the disastrous Cherry Creek flood of 1864 which destroyed many of the town's buildings. As a result of its situation on the lower ground west of the creek, West Denver sustained the greatest damage from the flood, causing some residents to relocate to the eastern part of town.² During the latter half of the 1860s, nearly all commercial construction occurred on the east side of the creek, setting the pattern for future growth. A description of the depressed condition of the west side in 1867 suggests the early roots of the warehouse district:

There has not been as much improvement on the west side as on the east side of the creek but the west side has not entirely gone up...Mercantile business has about deserted Ferry [11th] Street. There are a number of brick stores that if located on this side, would command good rents, but as they are they are useless save as warehouses for storage and surplus stocks.³

The contrast between the two sides of the city grew more dramatic over the next few years as East Denver was built up with substantial business blocks. Blake Street constituted the major commercial thoroughfare of the city well into the 1870s, when it was superceded by Larimer Street. At its peak about 1880, Larimer Street featured many imposing commercial buildings, including the newly completed Tabor building at Larimer and Sixteenth Streets, which "surpassed all others in size, character and expense of construction."⁴ (While the fabulous Tabor building and many other fine examples of this period have been demolished, the 1400 block of Larimer, now preserved as Larimer Square, represents an intact block of 19th century buildings from its period of prominence.)

With the commercial dominance of East Denver firmly established, West Denver developed largely as a modest residential and warehousing district. A few pioneer manufacturing concerns, largely devoted to iron-working (e.g. foundries, machine shops and blacksmith shops), also sprung up in the area. The early Denver industries of brewing and flour milling were represented by James Endlich's tiny brewery at 10th and Lawrence Streets, which ultimately evolved into the huge Milwaukee Brewery, and John W. Smith's Excelsior Mill, later part of the famed Hungarian Mills.⁵ However, the problem of adequate transportation necessarily limited these first attempts at manufacturing.

The arrival of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in 1871 provided a much needed boost to West Denver industry, but growth was hampered by the railroads' self-interested policy allowing cheaper rates on the transportation of goods manufactured east of the Missouri River.⁶ In addition, the principal railroad facilities were located in East Denver in the yards north of Wynkoop Street, the heart of the warehouse district. Railroad construction was limited in West Denver by its geographical situation, as it reached the banks of the South Platte River at Wewatta Street (originally known as 1st Street). Over the next three decades, however, repeated flooding of the South Platte River and Cherry Creek shifted the river's course to its current approximate location several blocks to the north. This occurrence allowed the further development of the Platte Valley as a major railroad artery in the 1880s.

The expansion of Denver's railroads and the lifting of excessive shipping rates after 1885 contributed to a period of unprecedented growth in industry. For the year 1885, the Denver Republican reported an increase in Colorado manufacturing of 25% over the previous year and noted that "with 100 immigrants a day coming into this state, the local cheapening of industrial processes, and the more amicable attitude of the railroads, Colorado's dependence on Eastern supplies is steadily lessening."⁷

The new railroad yards north of Wazee Street in West Denver made this area particularly attractive as a manufacturing and wholesale center. During the mid-1880s, large factories began to appear throughout the Platte Valley, which one source accurately predicted was "destined to become the manufacturing center."⁸ Up until that time, West Wazee Street had been dominated by modest frame and brick residences. The sole industry was represented by the Annheuser-Busch brewery depot at 10th and Wazee Street. The small warehouse buildings in the vicinity fronted on the numbered streets rather than on Wazee; a street orientation that was immediately altered after the new railroad facilities were added. With a street frontage on Wazee and the railroad yards directly behind the buildings, this became an ideal location for a warehouse district.

About 1886, the first of the substantial brick warehouses which comprise the West Wazee Street Warehouse District was constructed at the northwest corner of 13th and Wazee Streets. Originally known as the J.M. Moore Estate Warehouse (1225-1245 Wazee, HABS Nos. CO-72-F, CO-72-G), it served the prestigious John M. Moore & Sons Hardware and Wagon business, a pioneer Denver company continued by Lucius and John A. Moore, Jr., following their father's death in 1883.⁹ The 2-story structure extended the length of one-half block and housed four separate units. Prior to 1890, a third story was added to the three easternmost units of the building (the 2-story unit on the west, 1225 Wazee, was altered in the 1940s with a new facade but is considered a contributing element of the historic district). Somewhat utilitarian in style, the structure features long rows of windows with segmentally arched voussoirs and a corbelled cornice. The architect is unknown since Denver building permits are not available for the period of its construction (this is also true of the majority of the buildings in the warehouse district; architects are mentioned only for those known).

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The J.M. Moore Warehouse was constructed in the early stages of a boom period in the development of Wazee Street, as well as in Denver as a whole. According to an article in the Denver Republican in 1888, the portion of Wazee Street west of 17th was being transformed with substantial new business blocks, evidencing its growth as an active wholesale center and center of the retail implement trade.¹⁰ In addition to the advantageous proximity of the railroads, businesses in the vicinity expected to profit from the proposed construction of the 14th Street Viaduct, a 3,500-foot structure between Market Street and Platte Street, sponsored by property owners on either side of the Platte. The project had the effect of promoting further improvements on Wazee Street:

...There is no doubt but that they will put forth greater efforts to improve that portion of the city than has ever been done in the past. They need broad stone sidewalks and they need also to remove a few more of the old buildings, which are disagreeable to look at at least. They are not wholesome for an enterprising city like Denver, or beneficial to the prospects on Wazee Street. The street has a show of making for itself the busiest wholesale center of the city, and nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of its prosperity.¹¹

The anticipated development of West Wazee did not occur immediately. In fact, no major construction appeared for nearly a decade. Instead, boom era expansion in West Denver occurred largely in the railroad yards north of Wynkoop Street and in the factory district west of 10th Street.¹² The financial failure of the 14th Street Viaduct project three years into its initial construction was undoubtedly partly responsible for the lack of interest in Wazee. With the Silver Crash of 1893, the area suffered another blow, as virtually every industry in Denver went into decline.

Despite the adverse conditions of the post-1893 depression, this was not a period of total inactivity on West Wazee Street. In 1895, the second warehouse building in the Wazee warehouse district – the John Deer Plow Company – went up at 1143 Wazee (HABS No. CO-72-C). Originally a 1-story brick structure, two stories were subsequently added. Two years later, the 3-story brick building of the Colorado Casket Company (1221 Wazee, HABS No. CO-72-E) was constructed to the west of the J.M. Moore Warehouse. Featuring recessed vertical window bays and attractive Romanesque stone details, this structure was unquestionably the most architecturally refined of the three 19th century buildings in the West Wazee Street Warehouse District.

By 1899, Denver was experiencing a business revival and an attendant period of boom construction. With the ultimate recognition of Denver as an important railroad distribution center, local industries became regionally competitive for the first time in the city's history.¹³ The wholesale trade for the year of 1899 showed a particularly impressive growth, with an increase of 30% over the previous year.¹⁴ That increase directly reflected the expansion of business in West Denver.

Businesses in the vicinity of Wazee Street proved to be at a particular advantage at the turn of the century. The long-awaited finish of the 14th Street Viaduct construction was realized in 1899 when the Board of Public Works completed an entirely new structure at a cost of \$367,068.¹⁵ Its southern terminus point at Market Street was well-situated to Wazee. In addition, the close alignment of the viaduct to 13th Street allowed adjacent buildings to load directly onto it, thus encouraging the subsequent construction of large warehouses on that street. The expansion of the 7th Street railroad yards in the early 1900s helped to further promote industry in the area. These factors resulted in the greatest period of expansion in the history of West Denver.

Wazee Street became a solid warehouse district early in the 20th century. By 1897, the lots west of the Colorado Casket Company building on the north side of Wazee had been cleared to the corner of 12th Street to allow the complete development of the block. Four years later, the Denver Dry Goods Company filed a building permit for that site, intending to build a warehouse for their large retail department store on 16th Street.¹⁶ While the permit only designated five stories, a 7-story building was ultimately constructed according to a design by prominent architect Frank Edbrooke, later noted for the exceptionally fine Spratlen-Anderson Warehouse at 1450 Wynkoop, built in 1906. Featuring Romanesque details and decorative brickwork, the Denver Dry Goods Warehouse continued the trend toward prestigious warehouse construction on Wazee.

In 1907, two more buildings were added to the district in the 1100 block of Wazee: the Western Warehouse (1123, HABS No. CO-72-A) and the Colorado Moline Plow Company (1127, HABS No. CO-72-B). Again, both buildings exhibited multi-story construction and "factory style" architecture – a basic utilitarian form embellished with decorative details. The latter building was designed by the architectural firm of Gove & Walsh, architects of many of Denver's finest warehouse buildings, including the C.S. Morey (1896), J.S. Brown (1899), Littleton Creamery-Beatrice Foods (1903), and Barteldes Seed (1906) warehouses on nearby Wynkoop Street across Cherry Creek.¹⁷

The last additions to the Wazee warehouse district were the Brecht Candy Company Factory, built at 1333 Wazee (HABS No. CO-72-I) in 1910, and the Sears & Roebuck Auto Supply Warehouse, built at 1301 Wazee (HABS No. CO-72-H) in 1915. Like many of the other warehouses on the street, the former building was architect-designed; in this case, by the firm of Biscoe & Hewitt. For nearly forty years, the 5-story brick warehouse housed the Brecht Candy Company, an important local manufacturing concern, at one time described as the best equipped candy plant in the country.¹⁸ The Sears & Roebuck Auto Supply Warehouse contrasts with the adjacent buildings for its lack of architectural detail. A three-story structure of brick and concrete fireproof construction, it is representative of the shift to strictly utilitarian warehouse design.

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The entire area to the south of the Wazee warehouse district was characterized by similar warehousing and manufacturing expansion during the early decades of the 20th century. West Denver reached the height of its development during that period for the Great Depression of the 1930s brought about the failure of many businesses. The 1939 construction of the \$1 million Wazee Produce Market, extending from 9th to 13th Streets between Wazee and Walnut, brought a modest economic revival, but industry never fully recovered.

Despite the vicissitudes of time, the warehouses lining Wazee have remained viable businesses. The construction of the Auraria Higher Education Center during the 1970s resulted in the demolition of many of the historic buildings remaining in the original West Denver area. The virtually intact row of warehouse buildings between the 1100 and 1300 blocks on the north side of Wazee comprises one of the most important remnants of this once bustling warehouse and factory district. Although the construction of the new Speer Viaduct will require the demolition of the J.M. Moore Warehouse - the original warehouse in the West Wazee Street Warehouse District - proposed plans by the City of Denver for parking, landscaping and other amenities in the vicinity of the historic district should assist in the preservation of the remaining structures.

FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Hall, History of the State of Colorado (Chicago: The Blakely Printing Company, 1889), p. 233.
2. Jerome Smiley, History of Denver (Denver: Times-Sun Publishing Company, 1901), p. 372.
3. Rocky Mountain News, May 18, 1867, p. 4.
4. Smiley, p. 465.
5. Ibid., p. 875.
6. Ibid., p. 878.
7. "Manufacturing Growth," Denver Republican, January 1, 1886, p. 12, c. 3.
8. Ibid.
9. William Byers, History of Colorado, Volume 1 (Chicago: The Century Publishing & Engraving Company, 1901), p. 340.
10. "Solidity on Wazee Street," Denver Republican, December 15, 1888, p. 9.
11. Ibid.
12. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Denver, 1890-97.
13. "Denver is Coming out of the Dumps," Denver Times, April 30, 1899, p. 9, c. 1.
14. "Jobbers Feel Uplift of Better Times," Denver Times, December 31, 1899, p. 14, c. 1.
15. Smiley, p. 648.
16. Denver Building Permit, November 26, 1901.
17. Thomas J. Noel and Barbara S. Norgren, Denver: The City Beautiful (Denver: Historic Denver, 1987), pp. 102, 202.
18. "Tons of Candy Made Annually by Brecht Co.," Denver Times, February 8, 1923.

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B. NEWSPAPERS/PERIODICALS

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"Manufacturing Growth." Denver Republican, January 1, 1886, p. 12, c. 3.

Rocky Mountain News, May 18, 1867, p. 4.

"Tons of Candy Made Anually by Brecht Co." Denver Times, February 9, 1923, p. 13.

Western Architect and Building News, Volume 1. July 1889, p. 70.

C. MAPS

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Robinson's Atlas of the City of Denver, 1887.

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D. UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

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